

Judiciary Committee

IN FAVOR OF HB 6888: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE

IN OPPOSITION TO HB 6889: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE MATTERS

March 15, 2023

Dear Chairs Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Raven Jennings and I am an ally of the Connecticut Justice Alliance (CTJA).

I'm writing this testimony to communicate my strong support for HB 6888: An Act Concerning Juvenile Justice. HB 6888 is a bill built on the importance of addressing the root issue. In order to achieve true equity, progression, justice, and ultimately increase public safety, every section of this bill is extremely important. Addressing reentry and diverting as many unnecessary cases away from the youth legal system is the best way to focus on supporting youth 1:1. System involvement has been proven, for decades, to increase the likelihood of recidivism, which is the opposite of what we've been trying to do as a state. Removing young people from the custody of the DOC is the most appropriate way to properly support youth with youth-centered rehabilitative resources, as DOC was created to incarcerate adults, not children. Sending children to adult prisons is harmful and does not increase public safety. Ensuring that youth have access to commissary items, and creating a commissary system that is not monetary, is essential, especially for those who can't afford basic necessities while incarcerated. Making sure that directly impacted youth and community members have a voting seat at the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee (JJPOC) ensures that those impacted by the decisions of the JJPOC are actually a part of creating those decisions - which is extremely important and productive. One way to address racism in policing is to collect data on who is being stopped. As research shows Black and Brown individuals are stopped at a disproportionate rate while driving, now Connecticut can see through data if the same happens while someone is walking. Connecticut must continue to move forward with creating a youth legal system that is fair, effective, and doesn't cause harm. Connecticut must put young people in positions of power, not in prison. Connecticut has the responsibility to ensure that all of its youth are given the resources they need to be successful. HB 6888 is a step toward making a more just Connecticut for young people. I urge the Judiciary Committee to pass HB 6888.

I'm writing this testimony to communicate my strong opposition to bill HB 6889: An act concerning juvenile matters. I am writing this testimony to communicate my strong opposition to HB 6669: An Act Concerning Juvenile Matters. **This bill is harmful to young people, families, and communities.** None of the provisions in this bill have a positive impact on public safety. Read the Connecticut Justice Alliance Fact sheet about sending children to adult prison. Sending children to adult prison is traumatic, ineffective, and expensive. I am opposed to any language that unjustly increases transfer to adult court. Many sections of this bill assume that the child's family is the problem. Instead of offering resources and support for families, this bill proposes holding a child if the parent is "unable to control" them- this is **UNCONSTITUTIONAL** and offensive. In terms of reinstating the Family with Service Needs petitions, this process causes a child to have unnecessary interaction with the legal system. Children are already being offered diversionary programs in Connecticut. Children shouldn't have to go to court to get services to meet their needs. Connecticut has a whole menu of behavioral health services and community programs for children who are experiencing behaviors in this category. This will ultimately **delay** children's access to services and harm their trust in "the system". Allowing courts to investigate a family when a child has been charged with a certain offense will have a disproportionate impact on

communities that are already over-policed and over-surveilled. Numerous mandated reporters exist in the realm of young people that they will come into contact with. Those people can make referrals to the Department of Children and Families if abuse or neglect is suspected. Connecticut legislators must focus on investing resources in families and communities, instead of incarcerating them. I urge the Judiciary Committee to oppose HB 6889.

Thank you for taking the time to review my written testimony.

Raven Jennings